Hood storing sleuth's probe of JFK murder

Sylvia Meagher did not miss much gathering information about the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

But she never gave up her full-time career at the United Nations, leaving her assassinations investigation for part-time pursuits.

Her collection of books, personal letters, clippings, notes on evidence, copies of government documents, tapes and even her old reel-to-reel machines, now belong to Hood College, stored in the archives in the Beneficial-Hodson Library and Information Technology Center.

The late Ms. Meagher was considered one of the premiere assassinations researchers, said Hood history professor Gerald McKnight, who is cataloging the collection.

"It's the 'A to Z' on the assassination," said Dr. McKnight, who teaches Politics of Assassination, one of the most popular courses at Hood. "This is a gold mine for Hood and for anyone who is serious about trying to find out what really happened in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, and then after the murder, too."

Included in the collection is Ms. Meagher's manuscript of the subject index of the Warren Commission report, the only index on record, Dr. McKnight said.

"Her prime concern," he said, "was the disaster we now call the Warren Commission. She knew the Warren Commission report inside and out and was one of the few knowledgeable and responsible critics of the work of the Warren Commission."

But Ms. Meagher, he noted, did not waste her time on theories or "whodunits." She was more interested in exposing the falsehoods of the government's investigation into the "Crime of the Century." However, she does point out in many of her personal letters and to other researchers, that in her opinion, Lee Harvey Oswald did not kill anyone on Nov. 22, 1963.

"She calls him the second victim of Dallas," Dr. McKnight said. "Sure, maybe he was involved in a conspiracy, but she did not think he killed the president."

Although only a partial catalog is available now, researchers can view the collection, Hood library director Charles Kuhn said. He said he expects a full catalog later this year.

Much of the collection is personal. It includes letters from people such as Robert MacNeil of MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour, who as a reporter for the BBC was covering Kennedy's trip to Dallas; Cyril Wecht, a pathologist who has disputed much of the autopsy evidence in the JFK case; and Mark Lane, another assassinations researcher. She even criticizes Truman Capote, who, with the government's urging, supported the findings of the Warren Commission.

And her notes cover everything from JFK's car to the curtain rods that Oswald said he was carrying in brown paper. She even clipped a legal notice in a Dallas newspaper that the U.S. Treasury Department ran to see if anyone laid claim to the Mannlicher-Carcano rifle that was allegedly used by Oswald to shoot Kennedy. Many of the notes are written on the flip side of old United Nations memos. One notes a message about a Turkish Air Force fighter violating Cyprus air space and the ensuing diplomatic struggle.

"It is a wonderful collection that will give you a sense of this group of Warren Commission dissenters. . . . It is an invaluable collection for any researcher who wants an intimate and detailed look into the kinds of associations that developed among these critics," Dr. McKnight said. "She was wedded to get to the truth in this matter and she did all she could to help anyone who was working toward taht goal, too."

There is a large collection of books, including Ms. Meagher's own acclaimed, "Accessories After the Fact: The Warren Commission, The Authorities and The Report," and perhaps a hundred books and manuscripts by other authors about the JFK murder. Other researchers so respected Ms. Meagher that they often sent her manuscripts to critique, Dr. McKnight said.

"She held the work, critics and apologists alike, to the same uncompromising standards," Dr. McKnight said.

Also, there is a complete set of Warren Commission documents and the materials used in the 1970s by the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which studied the murders of Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy.

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